

Syphilis rates down among Blacks

By Randall W. Maxey
Special to Sentinel-Voice

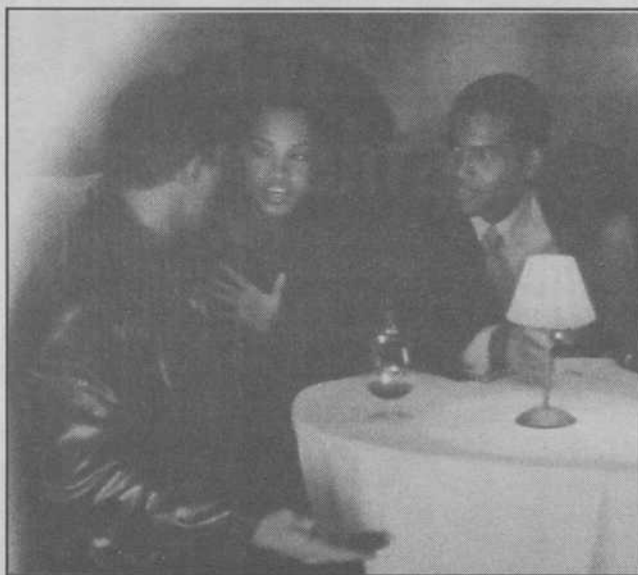
Even though it is part of a doctor's job, talking about the health crises that affect the African-American community can sometimes be too painful. Poverty, crime, homelessness, HIV/AIDS and many other medical and social ills we suffer are depressing topics to dwell upon. But when we turn the tide against one of these problems, talking about it should give us pride.

The progress African-Americans are currently making against syphilis is a perfect example of how we can address health crises. Although syphilis today still has a disproportionate impact on our community, increasingly aggressive community prevention programs and new data give us hope that the days of high increases in the rate of syphilis in Black America may be numbered.

Syphilis rates declined nearly 11 percent among African-Americans in 2002, dropping 2 percent among men and, even more impressively, 23 percent among women, according to statistics released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

In contrast, syphilis rates among Whites increased in 2002 by 71 percent. This increase was mostly among men who have sex with men. In the South, where African-Americans account for the bulk of syphilis cases, rates have plummeted every year since 1990, falling by 9 percent in 2002 alone.

The Black community's recent advances against syphilis didn't happen by



chance, or by medicine alone. Steady efforts by policy makers, the CDC, local public health officials, physicians and nurses, and especially by ordinary men and women, to raise awareness and expand syphilis testing, treatment and prevention, have turned the tide against the disease.

Victory isn't ours yet. The fact remains that more than 3,400 Blacks were diagnosed with syphilis in 2002, and we are still eight times more likely than Whites to get the disease. Like syphilis itself, the factors contributing to this health gap — poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, lack of education, prostitution, adolescent sexuality, racism, and lack of access to care — are still very much alive and well in America. But by building on our successes in the past decade, we have a real chance to overcome syphilis, once and for all. Here's how:

Learn about it. Syphilis is a disease medical professionals know everything about — cause, prevention, and cure. Black men and women need

to know, too. Syphilis is spread through sexual activity, specifically when one person comes into contact with the syphilis sore ("chancre") of another. Chancres can appear on the lips, penis or anus, and in the mouth or rectum. Avoiding sexual contact with a person with syphilis and using condoms are the best ways to avoid infection. Know the symptoms and protect yourself (and others).

Get tested. Despite the reductions in Black syphilis cases, too many in our community still aren't being regularly tested for syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). As a result, they are not being treated and may be infecting their partners. Pregnant women can also give syphilis to their babies.

Make syphilis testing a part of your annual physical, and even more often if you have sex with multiple partners. If you have HIV, know that diagnosing syphilis may be more complicated and might require a variety of diagnostic tests. To find the

STD testing site nearest you anytime of day or night — or for any questions about syphilis — call CDC's National Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Hotline at 800-227-8922 (in Spanish, 800-344-7432).

Get treated: A simple course of an antibiotic will cure syphilis. (Larger doses may be needed for those infected for more than a year.) Be responsible: Put sex on hold until treatment is complete (anywhere from one day to one week).

Talk about it. Spread knowledge, not syphilis. Discuss the disease with friends, family and acquaintances. Talking about it educates others and chips away at the social stigma attached to STDs. Doctors, use your waiting rooms; ministers, your pulpits; and politicians, your podiums. You can use your social circle to bring about positive change, too.

Testing, treating and talking are the roads to syphilis elimination. In Nashville, Indianapolis, and Raleigh, N.C., Black communities have been cutting syphilis rates by 20 to 30 percent every year because committed coalitions of faith groups, neighborhood associations, fraternities and sororities, educators, and public health agencies have fielded people to do ground-level outreach — door-to-door, in neighborhood clubs, barber shops, churches, mosques, beauty salons and laundromats.

One-on-one or in groups, they deliver messages about safety, personal responsibility and testing. And they've expanded the messages (See Syphilis, Page 14)

Video games may have sex, profanity

CHICAGO (AP) - Many teen-rated video games contain content that is not listed on the label, including sexual themes, alcohol and profanity, a study found.

Given the results, parents should be aware that popular T-rated video games might include a wide range of unexpected content that could have a negative influence on their children, said Harvard University researchers Kevin Haninger and Kimberly Thompson.

The current voluntary rating system "is not providing complete information to parents," Haninger said. "In many games there's content we think parents would care about."

The authors reviewed labels on all 396 mainstream T-rated video games available as of April 2001, and watched a random sample of 81 games.

Violence was listed in content labels on 373 games, or 94 percent; 15 percent were labeled as having sexual themes; 14 percent were labeled for profanity; and 2 percent were labeled for depicting substances such as tobacco or alcohol.

Among the sample the researchers viewed, 20 percent of games with sexual content including partial nudity listed that content on the label; 17 percent of games with profanity listed it on the label; and just 1 percent of games with depictions of tobacco or alcohol listed that on the label.

The study appears in Wednesday's Journal of the American Medical Association.

The findings point to a need for a clear explanation of the rating process, the researchers said.

Under the rating system used by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, games labeled "T" for teen are deemed suitable for youngsters aged 13 and up and may contain violence, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

Other ratings include "E" for everyone, "M" for mature and "AO" for adults only.

The system also includes brief content descriptors labeled on the game box. These include things like blood and gore, cartoon violence, drug reference and partial nudity.

In response to the study, the ESRB issued a statement saying that independent research has shown that parents "overwhelmingly agree" with the board's ratings.

The board said the study is based on the authors' subjective observations that "are certainly not more valid than the decisions made by the three specially trained raters who carefully evaluate each game submitted to the ESRB."

Police avoid indictment in New York shooting

By Herb Boyd
Special to Sentinel-Voice
NEW YORK (NNPA)

- Overcome with emotion, the family of Timothy Stansbury Jr. cried out for justice for the slain youth at a press conference last week, a day after a grand jury took a little over a half hour to decide not to indict Housing Officer Richard S. Neri Jr., who shot the unarmed Black teenager Jan. 24 on the rooftop of a housing complex in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

According to sources close to the case, Neri, who is White, told the grand jury that it was an accident.

"This officer has the opportunity to go home to his family and eat dinner with them," said Irene

Clayburne, the youth's grandmother. "He has taken that right from us."

Phyllis Clayburne, Stansbury's mother, said, "They took my son from me, and I am shocked that we didn't get justice in this case." Similar expressions of grief and outrage came from the youth's father, Timothy Stansbury Sr.

"What we have here is a gross miscarriage of justice," Councilman Charles Barron told a throng of supporters and onlookers at the press conference, including the Rev. Herb Daughtry and Councilman Al Vann. "It is no accident when you have your gun raised and your finger on the trigger, and give no warning. He should be indicted and kicked off the

force."

Barron also questioned the grand jury procedure.

"This should be a public procedure and not a private one," he insisted. "We should know exactly who's there, what is said, and how the district attorney presents the case. We have no idea whether or not the district attorney was aggressive enough or just how he proceeded."

According to one news account, Blacks and Hispanics comprised the majority of the 23-member grand jury that decided Neri would not have to face criminally negligent homicide or second-degree manslaughter sought by Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes.

After Police Commis-

sioner Raymond Kelly announced right after the incident that "it appeared to be unjustified," there was an expectation from the Stansbury family and others that an indictment was a certainty. But the jurors officially handed down a vote of "no true bill," indicating that even though Brooklyn prosecutors asked a grand jury to return a charge of criminally negligent homicide against Neri, the jurors voted not to do that or to indict the officer on any lesser charges.

Neri's attorney, Stuart London, said that his client explained to the grand jury that he didn't mean to shoot Stansbury, who was (See Justice, Page 14)

Shootings

(Continued from Page 4)

Gregory Truitt shot Lennon Johnson after he was pulled into Johnson's car.

Travis County grand juries declined to indict Coffey and Truitt and neither was disciplined by their departments.

Glasgow was indicted in October on a charge of criminally negligent homicide. The indictment was later dismissed. Last week, he was suspended for 90 days without pay after Police Chief Stan Knee ruled he violated department policies.

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